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The Tower Essence

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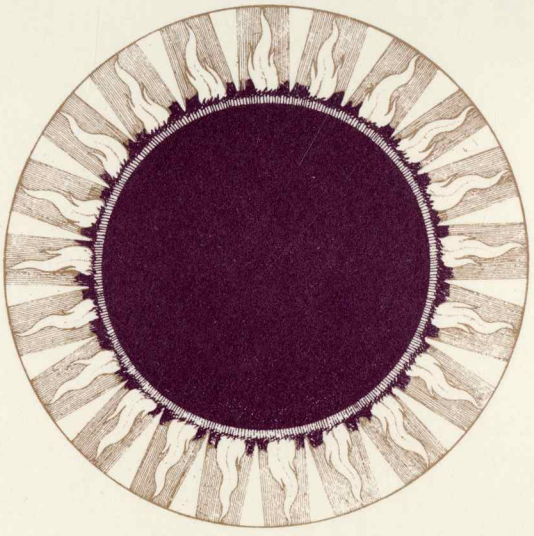

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The Tower Essence

The University of Montevallo
Art and Literary Magazine

1992

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"Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic, be enthusiastic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Tower
Essence

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A Note from the Editor...

This is you. This is me. This may be as close as most of us will ever come to meeting one another. However, I've managed to put a potpourri of personalities and ideals between two covers. Personally, it wasn't the easiest job in the world, considering the amount and quality of the contributions, but the deeper the well, the cooler the water.

I chose a theme for *The Tower* this year that I believe accurately describes the purpose of this magazine--the Essence. After all, that's exactly what you're going to find inside this book. You will see that your peers have the talent to transform words and pictures into magic, fear, romance or hatred.

Not only is the essence of the individual seen, but this collection also reflects the University as a whole. Amazingly enough, our differences seem to strengthen this institution rather than dissect it.

I must also take this opportunity to thank those who have supported *The Tower* through random acts of kindness and/or advice. So, Earline Howell, Jenny Sapp, Nancy Marshall, and Will Dobson, may I say bless you.

Well, without further adieu, I present the 1992 edition of *The Tower*.

M. Brooks Brown
Editor, 1992

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The Tower Essence 1992

Poetry

1 Africa
by Satya Gbadamosi

3 Mary and Joseph
by Michael McElroy

3 Cat
by Gina Killingsworth

4 Catholic Poem
by P.C. Wilm

6 Untitled
by Hulsey

7 In Her Room
by Karma de Gruy

9 Escape Artist
by Anthony Jay Jones

10 Careful and Crazy
by Jess Marie Walker

12 A Star Takes Center Stage
by Scott Martin

15 Ode to the Bigot
by Satya Gbadamosi

18 Untitled
by Angel Yarbrough

21 Pale Sisters
by Hulsey

23 Push and Push
by Jess Marie Walker

23 Untitled
by Olivia Massey

26 Under the Gingko
by Sharon Renee Evans

Cover Photo: Grant Tatum
Displacement Series

Art

2 Self Portrait
Prentiss Douthit

5 Jess
Prentiss Douthit

8 Untitled
Michael Johnson

11 Pleasant Constraints
Grant Tatum & Amanda Driggers

13 Untitled
Aimee Thornton

14 Untitled
Aimee Thornton

17 Untitled
Phil Proctor

19 Blind Contemplation
Grant Tatum

20 Displacement Series
Grant Tatum

22 Ceramics
April Camp

24 This is Me
Prentiss Douthit

25 Untitled
Grant Tatum

27 Untitled
E. Brooks Brown

28 Porcelain Mortis
Grant Tatum

39 Untitled
Aimee Thornton

Prose

29 Jimmy Cryin'
by Bryce R. Northen

37 Breaking the Colt
by Chris Lumpkin

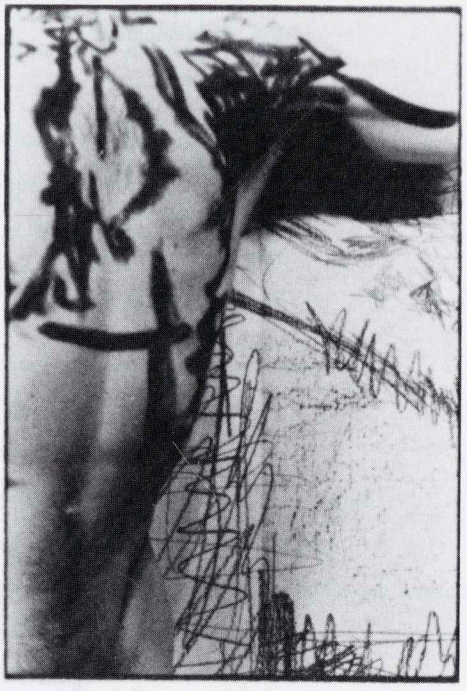
Africa

Strong sister
float on the ocean
proud
stand on the earth
feet fathoms deep
head to the heavens

Rape ain't shit to you
by now
I hope
they can't contain their lust for you
beautiful mother built so fine
Strong mother keeps smiling
at your savage kin
suckling greedily
on both teats
not relinquishing
no gratitude shown
killing their half-brothers
just for a piece of ass

Stand in the center of the world awry
standing tall
cancer in your bones
cancer in your blood
still
joy in your hands
evil kin you hold
dance in your soul
feed your young
this insatiable world
starve mother
fasting for your children's sins
I suppose
How else can I comprehend it?

Satya Anike Gbadamosi



Prentiss Douthit
Untitled self portrait
Black & white photography

mary and joseph

when she lay her head
on his shoulder,
the world seemed
to disappear.
there was
no sainthood, no
holy family, no
martyrdom. she
was only mary, a
peasant girl,
and he was joseph,
a carpenter.

Michael McElroy

Cat

The day's last warm rays
summon her
to the warm spot
before the window.
Purring lazily,
she lounges,
regal as a queen
draped on a throne.
Soft black velvet
blankets her muscles
and sheathes her claws,
hiding savage power
beneath graceful repose.

Gina Killingsworth

Catholic Poem

No writer can sleep...yes.
It is eternal, the disease we pulse
Wretching hands, twisted in AM fury...
Out like the Television
With its snow and rabbit ears.

Technology is something to shine
On the two that choose to kiss.
(His hand, under her shirt,
A firm grip)

Technology is something to shine
On the two, stretched on the couch
Shoes removed,
Silently talking into each other's mouths
They are writing with their tongues:
Mischief, loveletters, lies...the nonesuch nonsense.
(Her leg massages his, both
are working)

Technology is something to shine...
And what of the school bus memories?
No more...they escape the room as steam from cigarettes.
Pressed together, each holds...
A fistful of childhood
Their merry past is squeezed tight, faded.
Tonight they are not being graded.
(He pulls up her shirt, revealing
two bra-less breasts)

Technology shines...
Open bitch, shameless bastard.
They writhe like Electricity, not Science.
It is something to plug in and glow
Until the switch is pulled,
And all the glory is gone.

P.C. Wilm

Prentiss Douthit
Jess
Mixed media

Untitled

I am not as surprised as I thought
I would be
By the distance I feel between us now
Not so much in miles as in minds
Our opinions and thoughts travel different trains.
Once, I was the caboose that followed
the roaring steam-roller engine of your mind.
Now my train has a new engineer-myself-and I am
remembering what once was,
and feeling disappointed in you now.
You have rolled over the same tracks
before and again
in a different traveller's guise—
the fraternity little sis, the hippiee,
the working girl, the outdoorsy type,
the punk, the country hick, the performer—
Each costume you pick for your games
is the same,
a stereotype of what you wish you were
Instead of being what you are,
but believing you are being yourself
while being a train with a one-track mind;
self-gratification.
You are selfish to yourself and others.
I love you dearly, but this train
is pulling out of this station and on down the line...
I don't understand if this is goodbye.

Hulsey

In Her Room

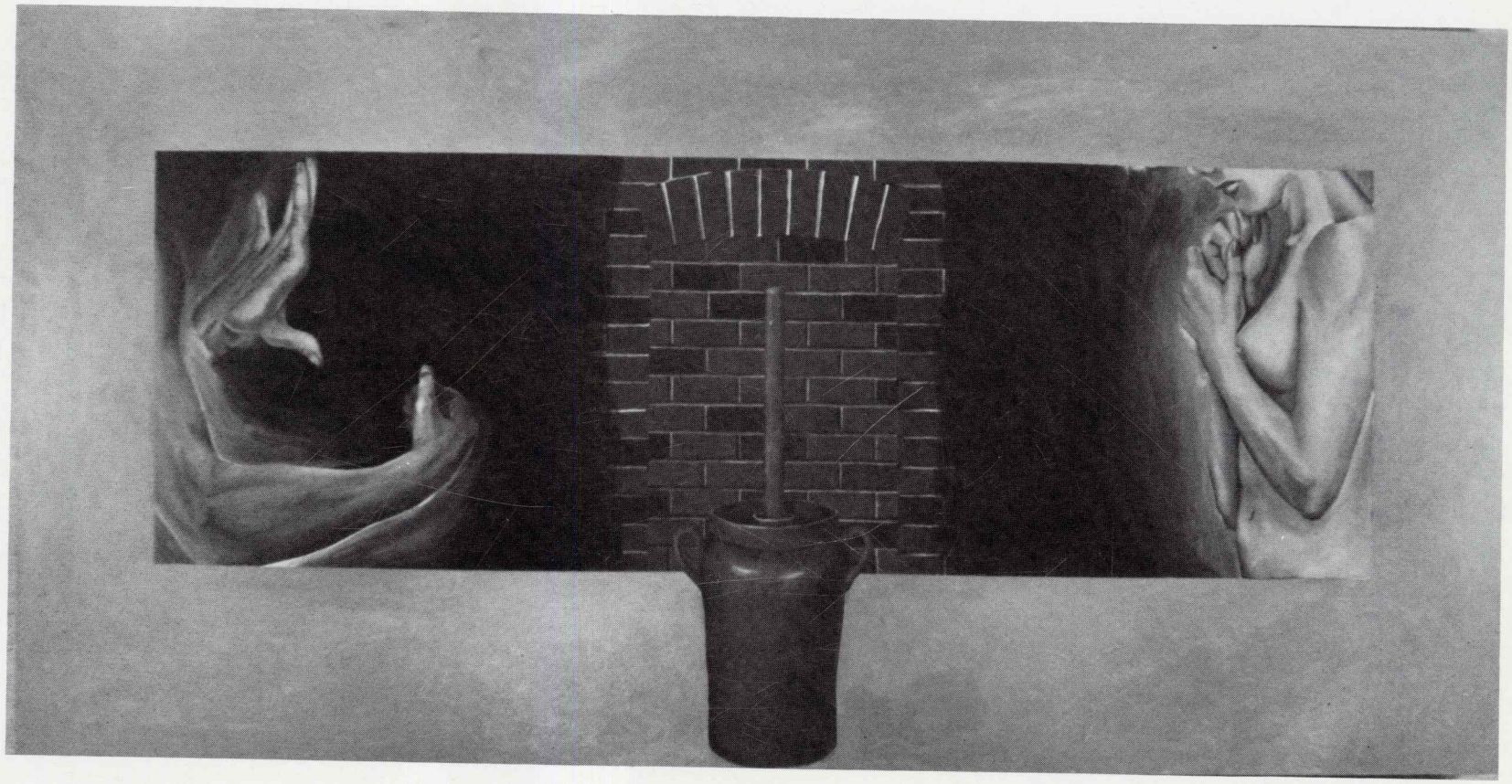
Pinned on the wall, the glittering
lizard skins of your many identities
waiting for an evening out,
pleading in their different voices.
"Be a ballerina, a madonna, a flapper girl,
dance with me tonight..."

I am more of a mess on your floor now,
sitting, smoking, watching you dress,
writing, and inventing urns for ashes
amidst shed skins.
I would rip away these eyes to find you.

I see your prayer-walls dedicated to images of
old women hiding curlers
and husbands hiding the scent of cheap perfume.
I see your altars to lipstick and veils,
to the drama of banality and the
triteness of passion.
I see your struggles and power to
disappear.

Let me be a hat to hide in,
a glass bottle of colour like powdered skin under stagelights.
Let me make a place on these shelves
to settle like a gargoyle
and watch you as you invent yourself
into a masterpiece.

Karma de Cruy



Michael Johnson
Acrylic

escape artist

on this and that on nothingness on all
he fed he bloated weary sick afraid
he cursed and died the tomb where he was laid
was where on that third day he heard a call

to rise from hard cold blackness and he did
he heard a voice that rolled away the stone
that from without within his brain his bone
his space did issue round his face he hid

and now he lives no miracle in sight
and here he feeds on only jest and rhyme
and moment as the secret voice did say

what secret voice what brought him through that night
why silent strolling smiling through his time
he does not know can't care has life has day

anthony jay jones

Careful and Crazy

The city
and the woods
is a lot the same—
things growin' up
and fallin' down
all around.
Movement's
real crazy-like—
thickness.
It's hard 't survive in either
but
whether there's life
in one
or
the other
it's got'ta survive—
careful—
crazy.

jess marie walker

sanitarium

when the men in white jackets take me away,
i want a nice padded room in which to stay.
just make the cushions a nice shade of black.
after i go inside—just tell me front from back.
paint a mural of stars onto the ceiling.
to be part of the galaxy is a wonderful feeling.
just tell the nice men to give me drugs
and ask them please not to act like thugs.
let me out of my cell when the moon is full.
that way things will never get dull.
oh yes, and when it comes to my attire;
in a simple straight jacket, i'll choose to retire.

Kelly S. Gamble

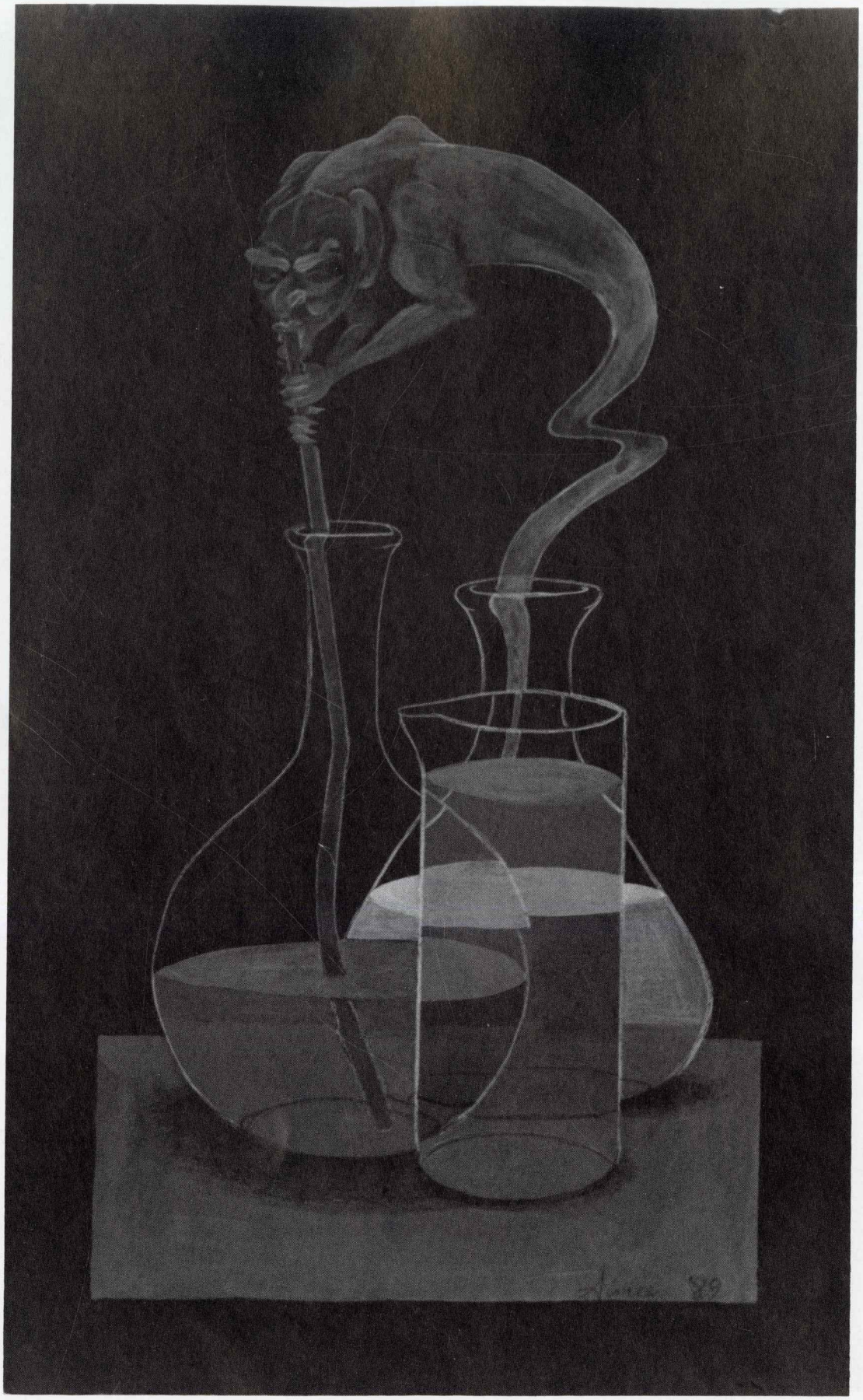
Grant Tatum and Amanda Driggers
Pleasant Constraints
Relief body print, tempera

A Star Takes Center Stage

The blunder of the wonder
Ascension
O Holy of Holies.
Look into the light
The fright of the might–
A giant tiptoeing amidst the trees.
An attempt to appease,
To please
Him. As a whim
I raise the cathedral
And enter the sanctuary.
The host of angels chant a name
To blame
The sins of man.
They have a plan.
A white neck points a finger–
I linger
To await my judgment.
I am sent
To forgive the sins of man.
He points again.
Voices chanting, raving, crying
For redemption
From one–
The Son.

I raise my hands toward heaven
And laugh–
The doubt echoes in my mind.

Scott Martin



Aimee Thornton
Acrylic

Aimee Thornton
Acrylic

Ode to the Bigot

Pitiful bigot
I know it's hard
I'm sure you don't see many
nice days

You see bigot
when you close
your mind
your eyes
your heart
when you sell your soul to evil
you miss it all
negative
and postive

I see
bigot
how your hate
maims and eliminates the weak
true and tragic enough

But on the other side of it all
bigot
it drives the strong
your inequities
give its backbone weight
to develop
character
wit
beauty
charm
mystery and cunning
to a greater degree than yours
to get past your moats
filled with stereotypes and barriers
to build past your cul-de-sacs
you so happily sell
to rise again
just as willingly as the first time
after being trampled and raped of dignity

Keep missing out bigot
I know it's hard to be a coward
to bathe in fear
to feed on hate
to sleep in a bed of rage and contempt
to dream of annihilating the different
to hide behind a fortress of lies

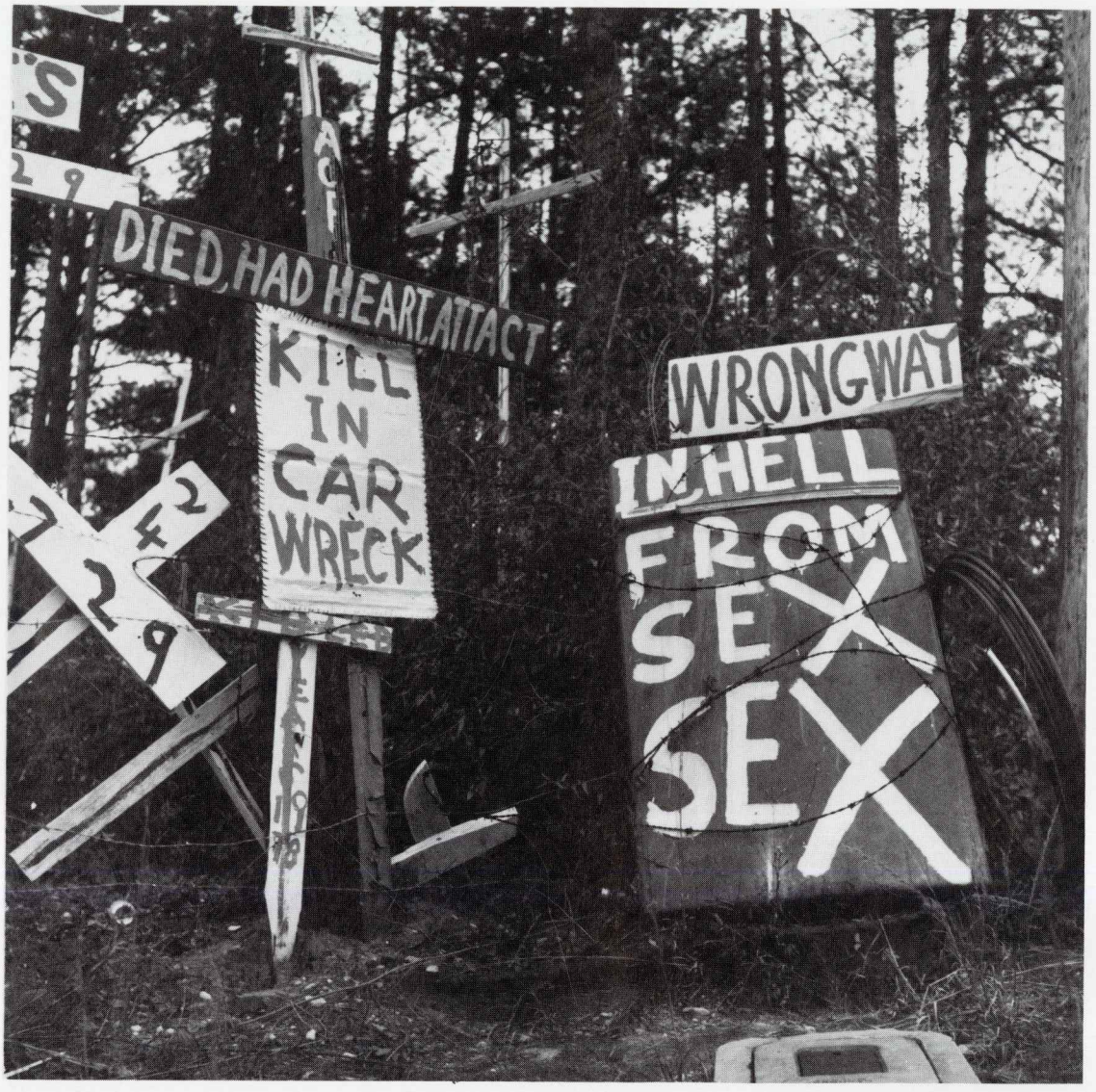
The pain must be unbearable
Bigot
when you see a change
a difference
an inconsistency
in this chaotic world
swarming with
changes
differences and inconsistencies

I know you breathe a sigh of relief
when your dam
holds back
for yet another day
all despised entities

But
on the other hand
bigot
you fear the day
aware of the inevitable
that your flimsy reservoir
gives
and you are consumed
drowned
destroyed
by all of the
"maladies"
of the world

Pitiful bigot
it must be hard.

Satya Anike Gbadamosi

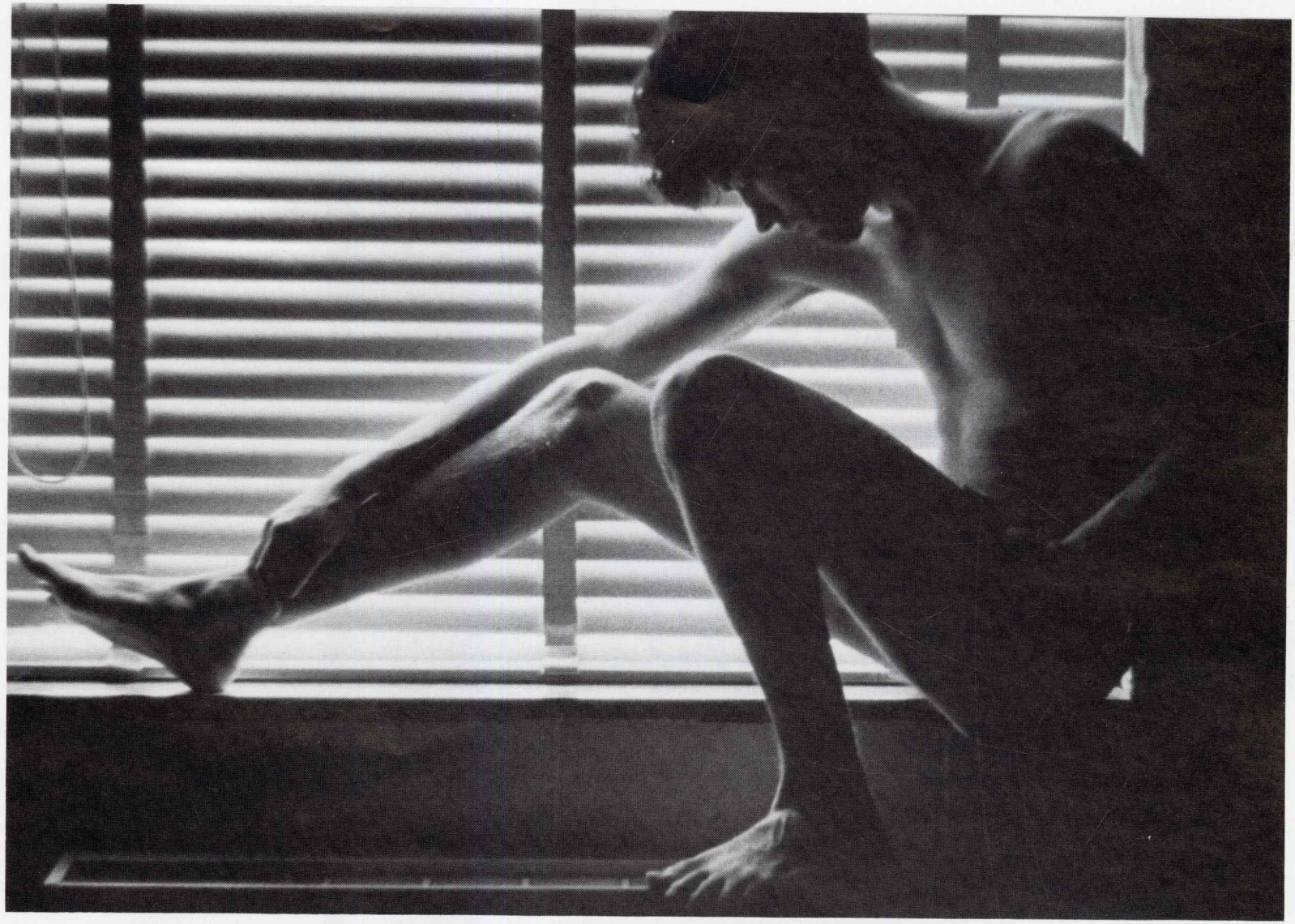


Phil Proctor
Black & white photography

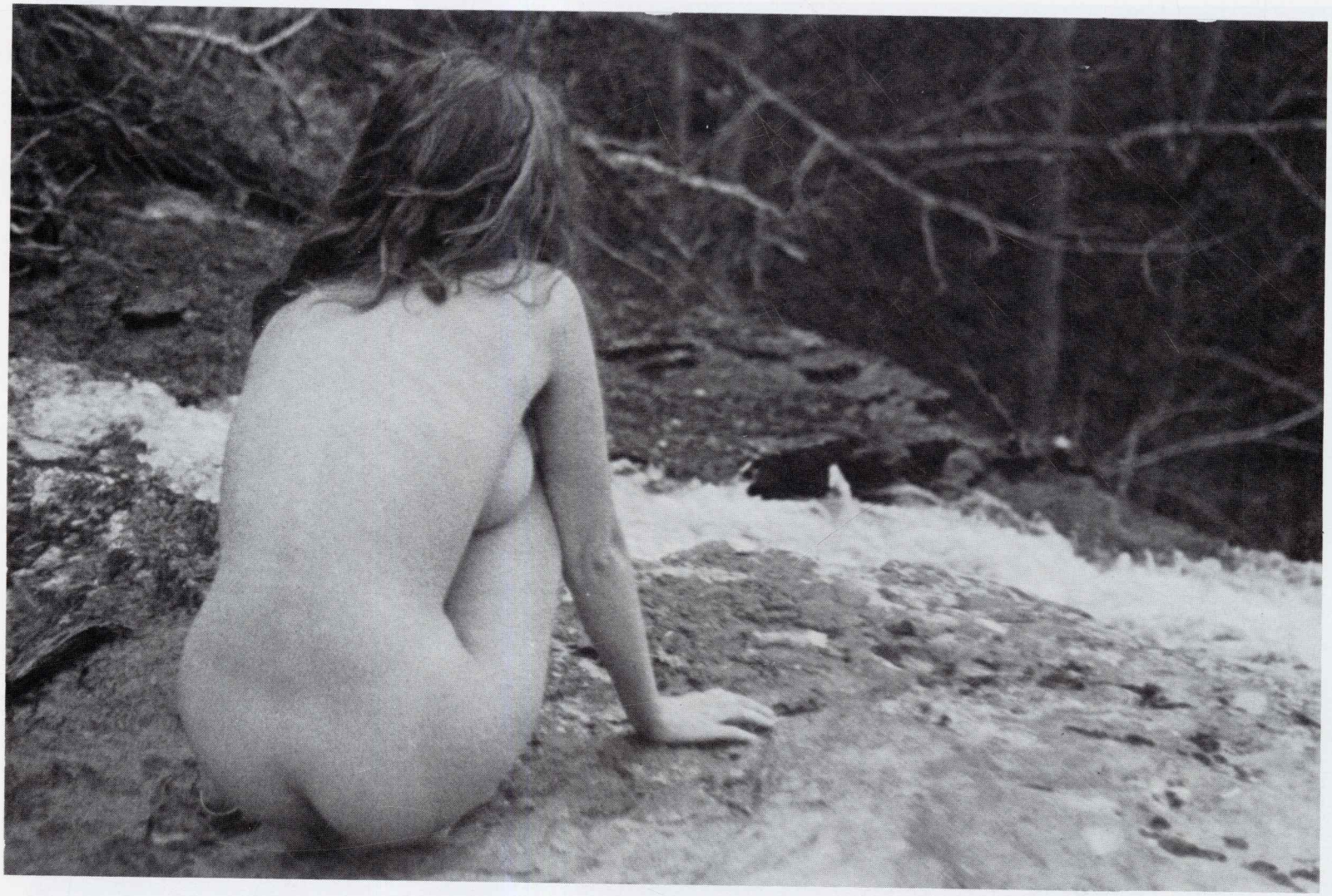
Untitled

I believe in you
And the pain you give
The separation of physical and spiritual
I forge them together
For you to destroy with your rage
Chant for me
Sing me songs
Cry for me
I will never know myself
You have stolen me
Raped my heart
Plugged my mouth
I cannot speak to you
You would not hear
Absence of ears
No understanding of needs
No eyes to see the truth
No tongue to shout at your maker
Blasphemer
Wretched mother fucker
Harder, deeper
You can do it
You want to
I know it
Your black soul would feed and grow
Such a terrible nemesis
Your own screaming face
Eating itself

Angel



Grant Tatum
Blind Contemplation
Black & white photography



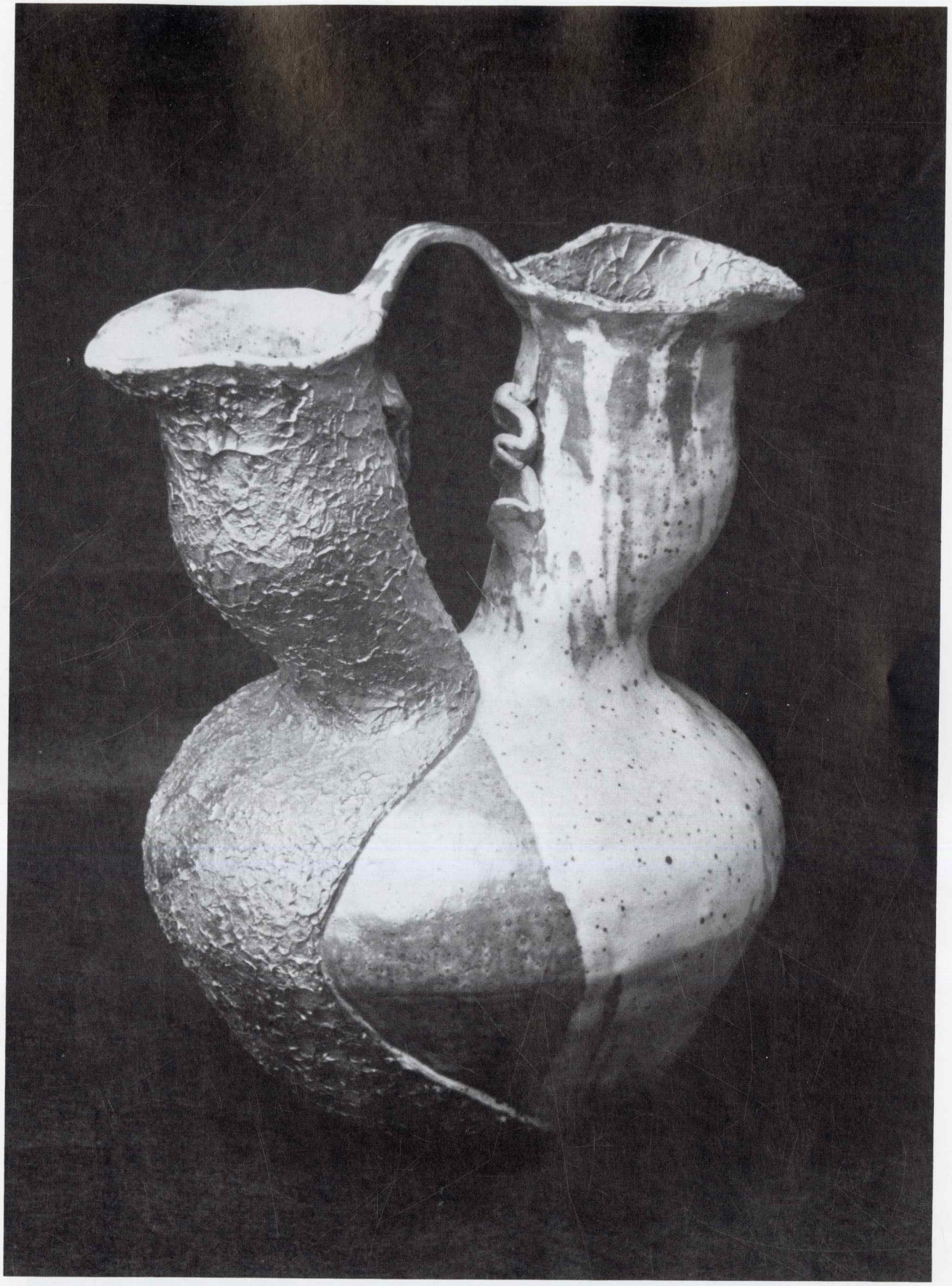
Grant Tatum
Displacement Series
Black & white photography

Pale Sisters

These pale sisters
With their blonde hair
And blue
ancient
eyes

and their cocaine habit
stand together
At a party
And talk about
"Getting It For Free"
Ain't nothin'
in life for free
baby
I want to say
stop
But how can I?
The price they
pay
Is their own
Not mine
I step away
glancing back
at these pale sisters
related merely
by the chance of choice of drug
and similar
emancipated eyes...
I shed my own tears for them.
We all pay our own price
To be alive.

Hulsey



April Camp
Ceramics

Untitled

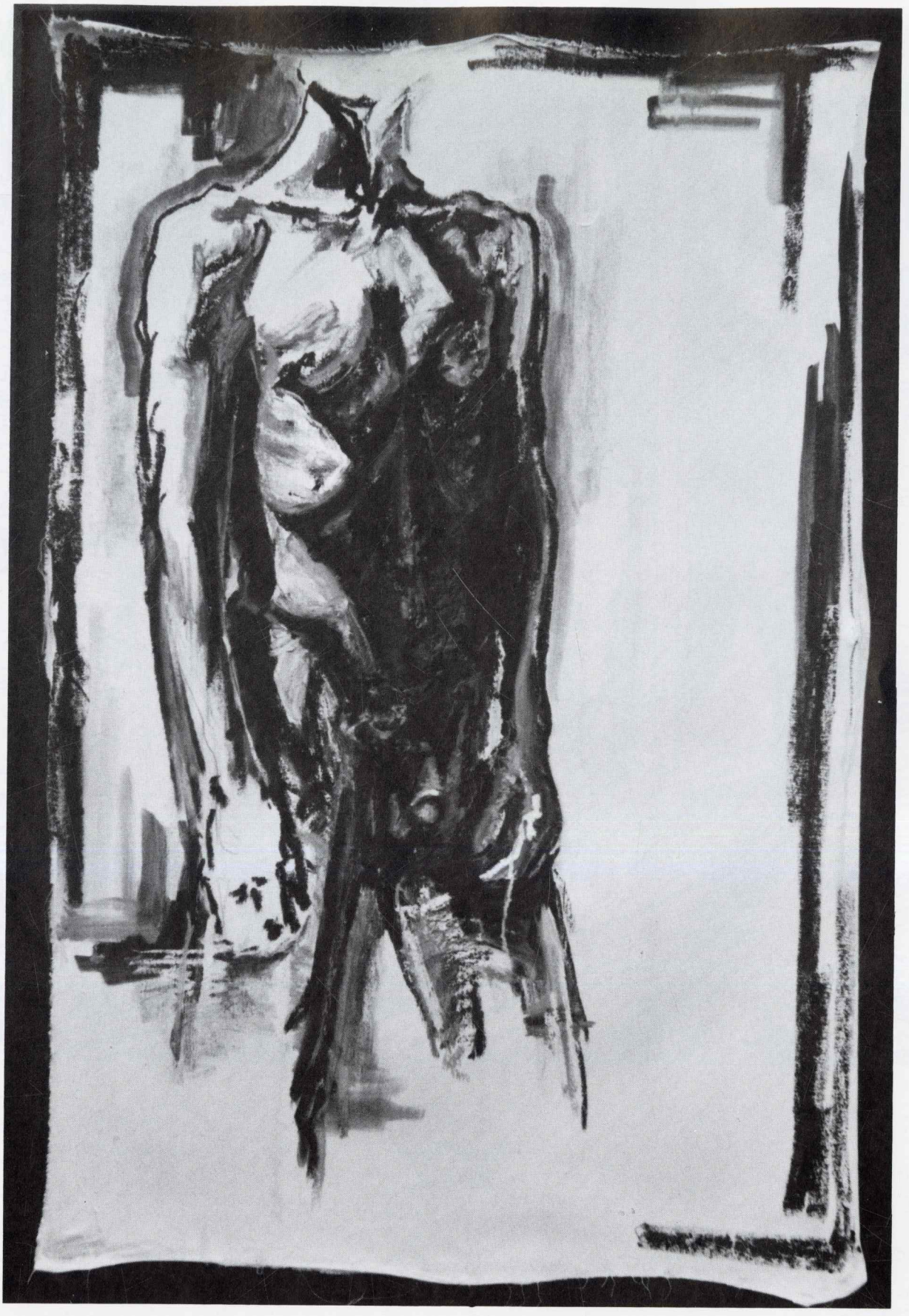
She turned around with
a new confidence, knowing
what to do
"I love you," she said
as she held out her
old wrinkled hand,
wanting him to take it.
He didn't move,
he laid there lifeless,
it was too late.

Olivia Massey

Push and Push

That old man bought him an old truck----age of that truck matched the age of the lines on his face. That old truck wouldn't run nowhere——just had to push it all 'round town——didn't even have no door handle——couldn't get in it and pretend like he'a driving——just had to push it all 'round town. Push and push 'til he get tired——sittin him on down lookin at that old dawg of his——age of that dawg matched the age of the lines on his face——sittin him on down thinkin to himself "mmm... that dawg tail sure do work good"——so he chop him off that dawg tail duck tape and glue it to the door of that truck hopin it work good as a door handle on the door of that old truck. So——he just go pushin and pushin all 'round town——push and push 'til he get tired——sittin him on down lookin at that old dawg and thinkin to himself "mmm...them dawg ears sure do flop good"——so he chop him off one of them floppy dawg ears duck tape and glue it to the end of the dawg tail hopin it work good as a fly swat to swat all them flies flyin 'round his head whin it's hot makin him dizzy makin him want'a fall down on the ground but the old man don't know ain't no floppy dawg ear gonna work as no fly swat. So——he just go pushin and pushin all 'round town——push and push 'til he get tired——so so tired——sittin him on down thinkin to himself "got me this damned truck don't run nowhere got'a push it all 'round town ain't even got no door handle can't even get in it and pretend like I'm drivin——got me this damned dawg tail don't work as no door handle——got me this damned floppy dawg ear don't work as no fly swat——all them flies flyin 'round my head makin me dizzy makin me want'a fall down on the ground——ain't none worth a damn thing——don't know what in the hell I'm gonna do——naw—— just don't know.

jess marie walker



Prentiss Douthit
This is Me
Mixed media

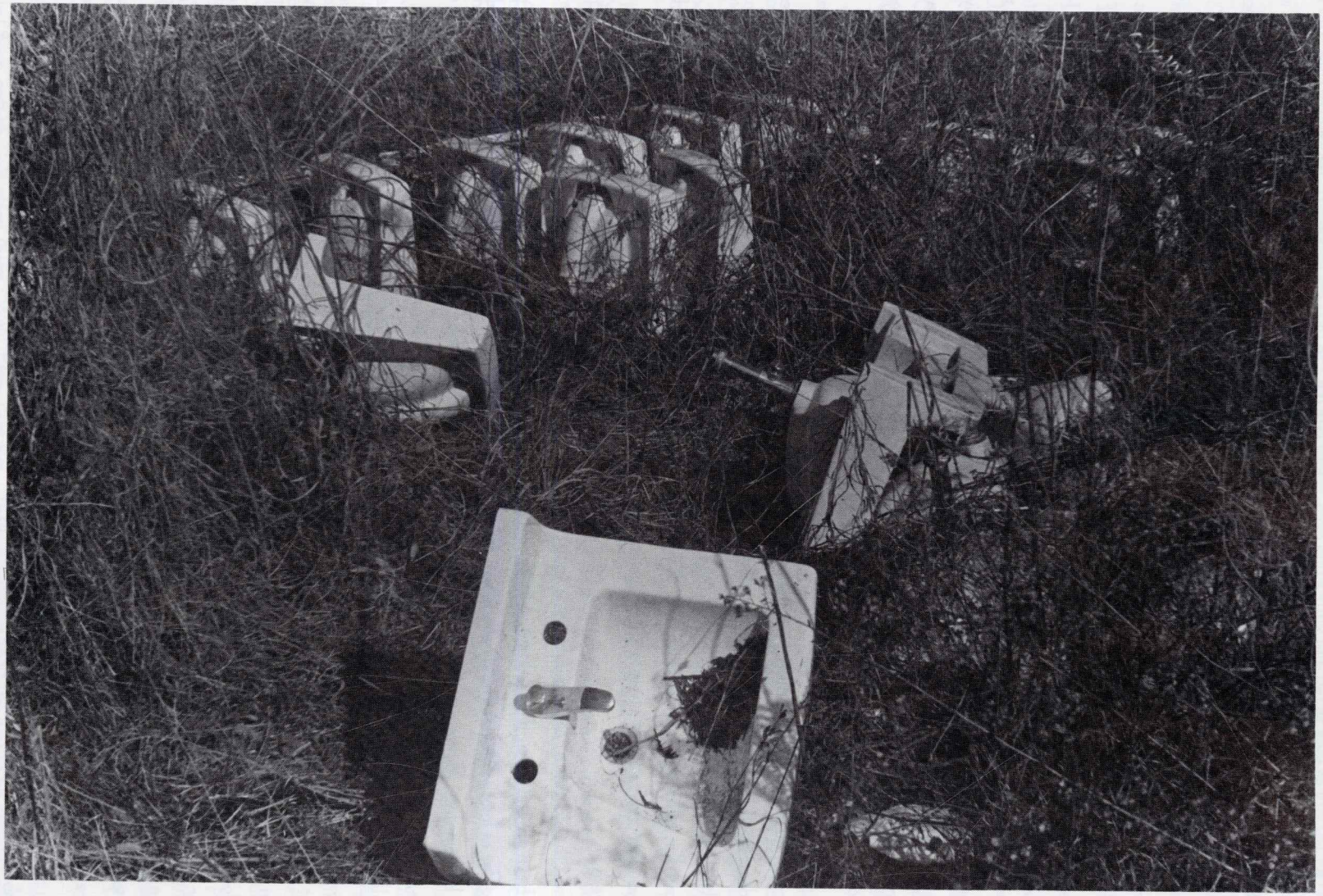
Grant Tatum
Pen & Ink

Under the Gingko

Sometimes my spirit disconnects from its source of sap
And I deteriorate like crumbled autumn leaves
Packed down between stiff blades of winter grass
and I lay dormant–
Until at your request, I sit up
Beneath this yellow-green halo
And let the wind whip away the dust in my hair
And be unalone.

Sharon Renee Evans

E. Brooks Brown
Charcoal



Grant Tatum
Porcelain Mortis
Black & white photography

Jimmy Cryin'

By Bryce R. Northen

Oh yeh, oh yeh
-Ramones

"Now that little Jimmy Blevins, he weren't no athlete."

The old man shifted his weight trying to make the pickle bucket he sat on more comfortable.

"No sir, he weren't no athlete, but one thing for certain, he sure did love the game."

He coughed and smiled slightly as he thought about what he was going to say.

"He was pretty much built like his father, and there weren't but one word could describe that man: scrawny. Course now, I ain't meanin' to talk bad 'bout nobody, specially 'bout nobody ain't here to defend theirselves, but I'm tellin' the truth. Always do. You get to lyin' and sometimes you just cain't stop. It's best to just not get started. Them's words to live by."

Nobody knew the old man's real name, but everyone called him old Cap. He'd been around town, doing almost nothing, except for sitting and talking, for as long as anyone could remember. He was generally thought to be harmless. Some people even thought he was sweet. There were, however, people who thought he was a bit bothersome, especially when they got roped into listening to him talk.

"Use to be, I'd go see every game. Every Saturday mornin' I'd be down there at the park. Use to love watchin' those boys play ball. Don't get down there as much as I should anymore. Ain't no reason really, just don't."

Cap never intentionally bothered anyone. He was just trying to live. When most people ran into him on the street they just told him it was nice to see him looking so well and quickly moved on. Only those who were too shy, or who wanted to seem like they cared, got stuck with him.

"I remember seein' Jimmy play. He weren't no good. Matter fact, he was probably just 'bout the worst ball player I ever seen. He played three years and didn't get one hit. Leastways not no real one."

The people that brushed Cap off weren't trying to be mean. They knew he would keep on talking whether anyone listened to him or not. They figured he didn't care if anyone wanted to hear his stories, that he just wanted to talk, that he liked to hear his voice, that it made him feel like he was alive.

"He'd step up to that plate and you could almost see him shakin', he was so scared of the ball. Wouldn't swing less there was two strikes on him, then he'd swing at anything. Damn ball'd bounce and Jimmy'd swing at it on the hop. I seen it happen."

No one was listening to him. He and his pickle bucket sat in front of the grocery store alone.

"I shouldn't make fun of the boy, and I ain't. It's a fact. He was bad. Prob'ly 'cause he missed out on tee-ball. Never got used to feelin' comf'table swingin' the bat. Don't know why that boy didn't play tee-ball. Most of the boys played. If Jimmy hadda he mighta been better. Don't matter none though. Truth is, he just couldn't play ball worth a damn. Ain't no sense in wonderin' why."

That pickle bucket was his. Everyday he carried it into town with him. Some people assumed he used it to carry stuff he found on the street home with him, but Cap didn't need to pick things out of anybody's garbage. The check he got every month was enough to satisfy the simplicity of his life. He just carried it so he would have something to sit on. It wasn't very comfortable, but Cap didn't mind.

"'Sides, it was just the little league, not like he was tryin' to make the pros or nothin'. He just wanted to play. That's what the little league's for, to give them boys a chance to play. Baseball's a good game for a boy. I played it once. Weren't no good, but I was better than little Jimmy. 'Course that was a long time ago."

It was. Cap was an old man. Nobody knew quite how old, but they knew he was old.

"Hey Cap. How you gettin' along?"

"Oh, 'bout the same as I always is. This weather comin' in's got me a little worried though. It's gonna get cold as Hell and that always slows me down more'n I like. Lucky thing I already got me a load of wood. Spent twenty-five bucks outa my last month's benefit just to get it. I remember back when you could just walk out'a town, out where the highway is now, and pick up all the wood you could carry, free as you and me. Guess them days is gone now though. Sometimes I..."

"Hey Cap, I'd love to stick around. You know I would, it's just that I gotta get into the store and get home before long. You know."

"Oh yeh, I remember when I used to be in a hurry like that. Seems like I was always runnin' around tryin' to do somethin' important. Cain't quite remember..."

"Well I'll see you. You get too cold, you let me know. I can go pick you up some wood in my truck if you run out. Take care of yourself."

Cap continued to talk as the young man walked away. Cap thanked him and told him about the best places to find wood, the best kinds of wood to burn, what kind of stove he had, and how he had to get up twice every night to put a couple more logs on or else:

"I'll swing my old feet off the bed and they'll just stick to the floor, right there frozed to the wood. That's the truth. That ain't no lie."

The young man was gone. He would be careful to avoid Cap on his way home.

"Now that's a good boy there. Always takin' the time to take notice of an old man. That's how Jimmy'd be if he was still around. Jimmy was a good boy, always smilin'. Didn't talk much though, and 'course he couldn't play ball worth a damn."

It was beginning to get colder. The skies had darkened a bit since Cap first sat down in front of the store. Although the rain would probably hold off for a while, eventually it would come.

"I remember his first year. He was on what was probably one of the worst teams ever. They couldn't do nothin' right. Mighta won one or two games, but no more'n that. I remember one time Jimmy came up to bat, weren't nobody on base, and he just stood there shakin'. Didn't even crouch, just stood there. Well, them first two pitches came in strikes. I knew Jimmy would be swingin' after that, and I was prayin' to God he'd hit the thing, but didn't 'spect he would. Well, the pitcher threw the ball and Jimmy, he just closed his eyes and swung that bat as wild as any bat's ever been swung. I don't know how it happened. To this day I don't know how it happened, but he hit the damn thing. Bounced right in front of the plate and rolled 'bout three feet. Jimmy, when he saw that ball rollin', he just took off for first base like a bat outa Hell. Catcher picked the ball up and Lordy, he musta sailed it 'bout five feet over the first baseman's head. Jimmy kept on runnin'. Right fielder picked the ball up and threw it. Damn thing rolled all the way through the infield into left. Jimmy woulda scored 'cept they had a rule that ya cain't go no more'n one extra base on a play like that. It's a good rule most times, keeps the kids from bein' embarrassed, but I sure woulda loved to see Jimmy score on that ball. Woulda loved it."

It was time for Cap to move, so he got up with his bucket in hand, and headed for the gas station.

"I wish you coulda seen Jimmy standin' on third though. Ain't nobody ever smiled as big as that boy smiled. He didn't know 'bout errors and things. He thought he'd gotten a triple and he was just a beamin'. I'm sure somebody told him. Prob'ly his father when he got home. Some folks just cain't seem to let a body dream. They always gotta go 'round wakin' people up. It ain't right. 'Specially with a kid. Oughta let kids have their dreams when they're kids. Lord knows they cain't have 'em when they're old."

Every few months or so some concerned citizen would suggest putting Cap up in a state home somewhere. They always claimed he was a danger to himself, or to the children, or to somebody. They always claimed they were worried about somebody's welfare besides their own. They were always lying. Cap made them nervous and they wanted him removed. Most of the time Cap never knew how concerned they were for him. Usually someone with enough sense to realize that all Cap had left was his bucket, his stories, and his freedom to walk around telling them would put an end to the talk.

"Boy, that was prob'ly one of Jimmy's finest moments. 'Course he loved every minute he spent on the field. He loved the game. You could tell just by lookin' at him. He sure did love the game."

Cap arrived at the gas station and set his bucket down under the overhanging lip of the roof so he wouldn't get wet when it started to rain. There was a bench he could have sat on, but he was happy

with his bucket. He could see Main Street from where he sat, and he could watch people coming in to get gas. He was satisfied.

"Every time he walked onto that field you could just see his face light up. He'd have that uniform on and he'd just strut around in it. Youd'a thought he knew what he was doin' out there the way he walked around. 'Course he didn't. They played him out in right field 'cause nobody ever hit any that far, but he'd stand out there waitin' for one. Looked like he thought every swing of the bat was gonna send one flyin' to him. Damn lucky thing it never happened or he woulda made a fool out of hisself tryin' to get at the damn thing."

There were a few boys working in the garage. When they saw Cap they stopped long enough to laugh at him. They thought he was crazy. They meant no harm. They just couldn't understand why an old man would sit on a bucket telling stories to people that weren't there.

"His second year I think it was, he was on a team called the Pirates. Had yellow and black uniforms. Had some boys on that team that could play too, but they was all havin' fun. They knew it weren't too important. That's the best thing for a boy to figure out: that it just ain't too important. Most folks forget that. They think things are just more important than they really are. Gets 'em confused. Makes 'em antsy."

The rain was beginning to fall. It was just a light rain, but thunder in the distance made it obvious that a storm was on the way. Cap stopped talking for a minute to smell the air. The station manager knew Cap was out there. He knew he was going to get wet. He was used to Cap coming by every day, so when he saw Cap he went outside to speak.

"Hey Cap, why don't you come on inside and sit out of the rain?"

"Well thank you sir, but no thank you. I think I'll just stay right where I am for now. Ain't nothin' like watchin' a storm come in. You can feel the air change on you, feel the quiet comin' in, then it'll break loose and all of a sudden it'll be stormin'. No sir, ain't nothin' like it. I remember one time a tornado came through town. Everybody was runnin' around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off tryin' to get in their basements and hide, but not me. I sat right there on my front porch whittlin' and watchin' the storm come in. It was one of the most beautiful things you ever could see. Trees swayin', rain comin' down, thunder and lightin' poppin' off all over. It was the power of God and you cain't hide from that. That's the truth. I ain't lyin'. That's a true story."

"I believe you Cap, you know that. I just don't want you catchin' cold. Who'd take care of you if you caught cold?"

"Right nice of you to take notice of me like that George, but don't you worry 'bout old Cap. He can take care of hisself. Been doin' it for years and I'll keep on doin' it for a few more if I'm lucky."

"If we're all lucky Cap, if we're all lucky. You sit there if you want, but you start to get cold or wet and you go on inside. I'll be back there workin', you hear?"

"Yes sir, I 'preciate that. If I had a car this'ld be the only place I'd take it. That's the truth too."

"I know it Cap. I know it."

George went inside shaking his head. He didn't know what to think about Cap. He liked him well enough, but sometimes when he saw the old man doing things like sitting there with the rain blowing on him he wondered if Cap might not be better off in a home or a hospital where someone could look after him.

"Yeh George you're a good man. You'ld make a good coach. You ever thought about doin' that? Coachin' a little league team? You'ld be a good one. You care 'bout people. You wanna help 'em. Some folks, all they care 'bout is winnin', but not you. You care 'bout folks. You should think 'bout doin' that sometime. You sure should. You could help them boys. You could teach 'em somethin'."

The boys in the garage had been watching Cap for awhile. They were laughing and pointing at him. The oldest was working up the courage to confront the old man.

"What folks don't realize is that for everybody that wins there's somebody losin'. It's the way things work. I hate seein' somebody lose, 'specially a boy. Breaks my heart sometimes to see a boy lose early. Breaks my heart. It does. That's the truth. The God's honest truth. It just breaks my heart."

Seeing the old man there sitting in the rain talking to no one pushed the boys over the edge. Two held back while the eldest stepped into the rain to speak to Old Cap.

"Hey old man! Who da hell you think you talkin' to? Ain't nobody outchere."

"I cain't remember who Jimmy's manager was that second

year, but he was..."

"Hey old man don't you hears me? I's talkin' to you."

"...a good man. He knew that there was more to..."

"You's just 'bout batty, you know dat? Out here in da rain talkin' to yo'self. You's just about a loon."

"...the game than just winnin'. He knew what was..."

"I knows dat you can talk 'cause I seen you talkin' to George. Ain't you gon' talk to me none?"

"...important and what weren't."

"You must not like me. Why don't you like me old man? I likes you even if you is a damn loon."

"...Just cain't remember his name though. He was a good..."

"Damn it, you old fool! Quit yo rattlin' on 'bout dat shit and talk to me 'fo you make me mad, hear? Cause you won't like me when I'm mad."

"...man. 'Bout like George, a good man."

"George ain't here you old fool. I's here and my name ain't George."

Cap stood, picked up his bucket and began to shuffle out into the rain. The boy from the garage cussed some more as he watched Old Cap walking down the street.

"Damn old fool walkin' 'round in da rain."

It was coming down harder now. The storm wasn't far off. The wind was picking up, and the sky had turned ugly. Cap just kept walking, looking down, trying to remember the name of the man who had coached the Pirates that year. When George noticed that Cap had left, he shook his head and wondered what had gotten into that old man's mind.

"A good man, that's what he was. The boys on his team had fun, win or lose. That's what the game's all about, havin' fun. I remember he used to buy 'em all Slush-Puppies after every game, win or lose, it didn't matter to him. Just so long as his boys was happy, he was happy."

"Behind the clouds the moon was rising full and pure. Where Cap walked there was no moon. The storm was there and it was there to stay. Cap kept on walking. He had a story to tell and the storm didn't change that. George didn't change that and those boys from the garage didn't change that.

"He did a good job coachin' too. Team almost made the play-offs. Woulda gone to the county tournament 'cept Jimmy messed it up for 'em last game of the season. Boy, I remember that game like it was last week. Just about everybody in town was out there. It was a good one too. Jimmy's team was down by one when he came up in the last inning. I'll tell you the truth, there weren't nobody there that thought Jimmy had a chance of gettin' on base, but he did. Don't quite remember how he did it. Musta got hit by the ball or walked or somethin', but that don't matter. The important thing is he got on and got moved up to third with two outs. You shoulda seen the people in those bleachers. All them boys' parents was goin' crazy. Kid comin' up to bat could pop the ball and all those folks thought they was gonna win it. Poor Jimmy, woulda been better for him if he had just struck out like normal."

Cap was getting soaked. The rain was coming down hard. He had to lean into the wind to walk. It was going to be a bad storm, and it was coming in fast.

"Jimmy was down on third tryin' to act like he knew what he was doin', but I knew he was scared stiff. All them folks watchin' him and all, made him nervous, woulda made anybody nervous, but 'specially that Jimmy. He was scared. He was just playin' off a little bit and he was watchin' that pitcher hard. The first pitch went in low, and Jimmy turned around to go back to third. Shoulda known better. Shoulda been told. They had a coach at third. He shoulda told Jimmy not to turn his back. You can prob'ly guess what happened then. Damn catcher threw the ball down to third. Damn thing bounced through Jimmy's legs right into the fielder's glove. Jimmy was out and the game was over. Just like that, Jimmy was out."

Cap wasn't paying attention to where he was going. He had walked right past the turn to his little house and was heading out of town. Later, the few people who looked out of their windows to see the old man shuffling through the storm would all claim that they had tried to call him, to get him to come in out of the rain, but they were all lying. Nobody tried to help old Cap that day.

"Ain't never seen pain like I saw in that boy's face that day. Been in a war, seen mommas buryin' their babies, and seen babies buryin' their daddies, but ain't never seen pain like I saw in little Jimmy Blevins' face that day. It was horrible. All them folks sittin' up in the bleachers didn't help none neither. They was screamin like the world was ended. They didn't help none. The boys on his team

just walked into the dugout and sat there like they was dazed. Jimmy collapsed on top of third, cryin'. Ain't never seen pain like that. Never. It was a sight."

Cap stopped and looked up at the storm.

"Ain't never seen pain like that in all my life."

He was soaked. Rain ran down his face and filled his shoes. Even his bucket held water from the rain.

"After awhile them folks cleared outa there. Most of the boys went home without even gettin' their Slush-Puppies. Jimmy's daddy had come out to watch the big game and after awhile he went out and picked him up off third and took him home, still just cryin' like a baby. Weren't nothin' could be done for him 'cept to just let him cry."

Cap sat down on the side of the road and took off his shoes and socks. He looked at his old feet and thought about the pain. He looked up at the storm, then put his shoes in the bucket and started walking again.

"Didn't think Jimmy would play ball that next year, but he did. Shouldn't have. Most kids without a feel for the game dropped out after the first few years, but Jimmy loved bein' on that field. He loved puttin' on that uniform. He loved bein' on the team."

Cap turned. There was a pause in the ferocity of the storm. Some might have thought it was over, but Cap had seen enough storms to know that the worst was still coming, barrelling over the countryside, bent on destruction.

"Jimmy didn't get so lucky that next year. He got switched from the Pirates to the Red Sox. Red Sox were a good team, had some good boys on it, some boys that knew how to play. Problem was their coach. He was a big ol' fella, big and angry. Everybody called him Junior. He weren't necessarily a bad man, he knew baseball well enough. Only thing was that he just couldn't stand to lose. Don't know why, musta lost early, that'll do it to you sometimes you know. Hell, it don't matter anyhow. Point is that the man couldn't stand to lose and he was bound and determined to make sure them boys didn't do anything to mess it up for him. He worked the hell out of 'em. Had 'em out there runnin' before practices, doin' pushups if they dropped the ball or somethin', and he was always yellin'. Don't recollect him ever havin' a kind word for them boys. Always yellin' at 'em, like instead of playin' a game they was goin' to war or somethin'. Cain't understand folks like that. Just cain't understand 'em."

Cap was walking. He knew where he was going. He hadn't decided, he just knew. He paid no attention to the road or to his walking. He was engrossed in the telling of his story. He had never been able to tell such a long story before. He was going to end it. He was going to end it soon.

"They won games too, won a lot of 'em, but them boys weren't happy. They was scared. They was scared to step on the field. They was scared of Junior. They was scared to lose. Jimmy was prob'ly scared most of all 'cause he messed up most of all. He didn't get no better for all of Junior's yellin'. If anything the boy got worse. He could hardly get on the field before Junior would see him doin' somethin' wrong and start to screamin'. 'Course Junior didn't let him play as much as the Pirates' coach did. They used to have a rule, still do I hope, that every boy had to play at least two full innings in the field and get three times at the plate."

The rain was starting to pick up again, but Cap didn't notice. He didn't notice the pain of the rocks that were digging into his wet feet. All he noticed was the sound of his voice. He liked the sound and didn't want it to end, but he knew it would. It would end soon.

"Junior tried not to let Jimmy bat unless there was two outs and not much chance of scorin'. He stuck him out in right field and told the center fielder to get the ball if he could. Junior didn't want little Jimmy Blevins messin' things up for him. He really didn't like the boy, didn't see why they let him play. He complained about Jimmy every Saturday before the game. Used to say that if his team lost it would be 'cause he got stuck with that little retard boy."

Cap arrived at the ballfield just as the fury of the storm began building again. The thunder was loud, loud and angry. The lightning lit up the sky with a destructive fury. It would have been a frightening sight, a glorious sight, if Cap had noticed. He didn't. He just walked out on the field and sat down on home plate.

"There this is how this story should be told. Have to try and remember that next time. It's easier to remember the way it happened bein' out here on the field. This is where it happened, right here on this field. 'Course things was different then. Didn't have no roof on them dugouts, just a bench. Them bleachers used to be made of wood. Didn't have no 'lectronic scoreboard back then neither. Had a guy out there with a big piece of chalk and a squared off board. The game was still the same though. Game won't never change. It'll

always be baseball wherever it's played. That's the truth. Leastwise, I hope that's the truth."

The storm had created a lake around home. Cap was sitting in about a half inch of water. It didn't matter. He couldn't get any wetter.

"One time late in a game he even made Jimmy fake a hurt hand so he wouldn't have to bat. Everybody out there knew Jimmy was fakin' and they knew Junior'd made him, but nobody said nothin', not even the other team. That's how Junior was, nobody ever crossed him. Maybe if somebody had said somethin' things woulda been different, but nobody did. I seen Jimmy after he went back into the dugout and that other boy went up to bat in his place. He was cryin'. Junior told him they didn't let no girls in the dugout, so Jimmy went out and sat in the car while his daddy watched the rest of the game. That boy battin' for Jimmy struck out and the Red Sox lost the game."

Cap paused for a moment and looked around the field.

"Here's where it happened, right here. Been a lotta good things happen out on this field over the years, but I cain't come out here without thinkin' 'bout Jimmy cryin'."

If anyone had seen Cap sitting alone in the rain on home plate they might have thought he was crying too, but he was not.

"For every boy that's ever walked off this field smilin' 'bout winnin' a game, there's another one holdin' back tears."

Cap didn't flinch when the transformer blew. He barely even noticed it. All over town there were people cursing the rain and trying to call the power company. Cap just sat there trying to figure out how to tell the rest of his story, how to finish it, how to give it the dignity it deserved. He began slowly.

"I don't reckon anybody really knows for sure what happened when them boys came out here for practice that next Monday, 'ceptin them boys that was here and seen it. I can tell you what happend, and you can believe it. You can tell other people and you won't be lyin' to 'em, but nobody knows for sure what happened 'ceptin' them boys that was here, them boys on that team. Them boys that did it. They're the only ones that know the truth about that afternoon, the only ones."

It was dark on the field. The storm hid the moon and the stars. Although candles burned all over town, nothing burned on the field. The storm left only darkness behind. Cap could hear thunder in the distance, but it was going away. Somewhere another town, another ballfield was getting the worst of it. It was dark on the field. It was quiet on the field. No cars moved through the streets. The empty bleachers did not scream at Cap as he sat on home plate. He was alone in the dark and calm, and he was ready to end his story.

"I love this feelin' you get after a storm. It's so peaceful, like you coulda' just been killed, but weren't. Everybody's still hidin' from the storm now. They ain't had a chance to come out and complain about the damage yet. There still happy just to be alive. Times like this don't come often, gotta enjoy 'em when they do."

"Most of the boys that was here didn't want to talk 'bout it. Cain't blame 'em really. Near as folks could figure, Junior had lit into Jimmy as soon as he got here. Who knows what for, prob'ly for nothin', just cause he was easy I s'pose. Them boys said he had Jimmy doin' pushups and was yellin'. Said that when Jimmy couldn't do no more Junior put his foot on Jimmy's back holdin' the boy down. Said Jimmy was cryin'. Said he kept yellin' at Jimmy to do some more pushups. Said he kept callin' Jimmy a sissy. Said Jimmy was cryin'. Said Jimmy asked Junior to let him get up. Said Junior just kept on yellin' at Jimmy. Said he kept tellin' Jimmy that if he'd quit, if he'd go home and never come back, then he'd let him up. Said Junior said the only way Jimmy could help the team was by quittin'. Said Jimmy was just layin' there, right out there by first base, just layin' there cryin'. Said they asked him to let Jimmy up. Said he told 'em to shut up and start runnin'. Said Jimmy was cryin'. Said they didn't know who started it. Said they didn't know how it happened. Said it just did. Said one minute they was all standin' there lookin' at Junior standin' on poor Jimmy, watchin' Jimmy cryin', and the next minute they was all on top of Junior. Said they didn't even remember pickin' up them bats. Said they didn't remember hittin' Junior. Said it just happened. Said they didn't know how long they beat on that man. Said they just did. Said they couldn't help it. Said they had to do somethin'. Said if we'lda seen Jimmy cryin' we'da know'd. Said they had to do somethin'."

"I'd seen Jimmy cryin'...I knew... Not one of them boys ever said they was sorry."

The sky above Cap began to clear. It was going to be a beautiful night.

"Their parents found them out there that afternoon, playin'

ball. They'd taken Junior's body and dragged it up to the plate. His bloody head was layin' right on top of home. They musta been playin' ball for an hour and a half 'fore anybody wondered why they hadn't come home for supper. Some folks said Jimmy was still layin' there face down in the dirt by first. Others say he was pitchin' and had gotten a hit and scored two runs. Don't make no diff'rence. State took him after that. Family moved away. Ain't heard nothin' 'bout Jimmy since then and you won't find nobody in this town that's got nothin' to say 'bout him. Just like he never were. Just like there wern't never a boy lyin' right there by first base cryin', beggin' for mercy and gettin' nothin'. Just like there wern't nothin'. Just like it."

Cap crawled to first base and collapsed in the mud. He wasn't crying. He was just laying there in the mud. He was going to die there, but some boys found him the next day and the sheriff took him away.

Ben Heu
Mardi Gras Politics
Woodcut print

Breaking the Colt

By Chris Lumpkin

My father knows. And I know. And I'm sure my brother knows, but he wouldn't say. But my father knows, and that's what's important. And *I* know he knows.

He was forever making men of his boys, who were really perfectly content with being boys because that was hard enough. But the early pressures of manhood weighed heavily upon the brows and backs of my brother and I.

My poor brother. He wanted nothing more than to be my equal in everything. He could be as tall, as smart, as talented as successful, but he could never be as old. He was, and is and forever will be, my *little* brother. Consecution held him eternal prisoner to that identity, and he would continually challenge those walls and bars with footraces and armwrestlers and fistfights. He was the mirror image of my father, who is also a fellow inmate of birthright.

Horses. That was what my father knew best and he was continually teaching my brother and me about riding and training and feeding and cleaning and brushing and breaking the natural will of a horse. He also taught us how to fight, how to cuss, how to chew tobacco, how to drink beer, and indirectly by our pure observation, how to smoke. We learned the finer points of country music and the advantages of fixing your *own* pickup. Guns, knives, football, hay baling and tractor driving were all core curriculum for manhood, and I had experiences in them all by my tenth birthday. I learned to love God and hate niggers.

According to my matriculation, I was a man. I did what men do. And by sixteen, I was an *old* man, for by then women had been added to my vocabulary. But I didn't know a damn thing about manhood. Not until *that* afternoon. *That* afternoon was supposed to be a lesson in halter-breaking, but it ended in heart-breaking.

We entered the shadowy barn and I felt blind after walking across the yard in the glaring sunlight. Flies drunkenly darted through the wire-topped chest-high stall walls. Frantic movement inside chased the flies away as the yearling colt shakily and awkwardly bounced and hopped around next to his mother in its own manure. This colt, in my experienced eye, was easily spooked. My father returned from the tackroom with a tiny nylon halter and my little brother in tow with the leash. My brother rarely left my father's side.

The door of the stall swung wide, exposing the skinny legged, wide-eyed colt, who bolted into the corners in fear of my father with the halter in his hand. The old mare stood still like a hippo in a pool; sluggish as she looked through half-closed eyes. My father somehow got one arm around the colt's neck and managed to hold it against the wall long enough for me to slip the halter over its bony face and snap the leash to the bottom ring. My brother led the old mare out and the colt instinctively followed. When we were close enough to the telephone pole outside in the searing sunlight, my father stopped the colt and ran the leash through a tire tube that was tied five feet off the ground. My brother took the old grey mare back to her stall. The colt bleated and pleaded for its mother, but to no avail.

It stood there looking around. I could see the whites of its eyes and its small ears stood erect, not missing a sound. The sun shone shiny on its slick sorrel coat. The tufts of hair inside its ears

were lighter and its little chin was covered with long, thick hairs. Its hooves were small; palm size.

The colt stood there, unaware, apparently, of its captivity until my father provoked it by waving his hands in the air. The colt instinctively moved away, taking up the slack in the rope and stretching the tube. Then it lunged back against the tugging tube and set his heels into the dirt, straining with all his might.

"See? If he'll ease up, he'll learn that the rope won't hurt him," my father said with unchallenged authority. He pointed to my brother. "Get my rope."

Moments later my little brother returned with the fetched coil and my father began to lightly switch the tense rear of the colt, causing it to tuck its tail and pull back harder.

"Daddy..." I said, but was cut off by a quick "sshh!!" "Daddy..." I insistently whispered, not wanting to enrage my father, but I got "the look." The line. The border. His unrestrained temper was one word away.

A heavier lash on the colt's butt and a cloud of dust erupted as the colt bolted forward and reared into the pole. Its eyes were almost completely white with fear. It stamped and shook, unsure of what to expect, and then leaned against the rope again.

"See? He's calming. We'll have this colt broke for Mr. Dunn in no time."

Mr. Dunn. This was Mr. Dunn's colt, not ours. Could you beat another man's horse?

"Daddy..." I felt afraid—afraid for the colt, not for myself. "Daddy, I think he's gonna spook. Don't you think it would be better if..."

"SHUT-UP!!" His eyes were wild with anger. "Who's doin this, you? You ought'ta keep yore mouth shut and yore mind open!" The colt jumped back hard on the rope and tube, and I thought it was going to pull the halter off his head, but it couldn't.

My father took the rope and whipped the colt hard on the back, so it would move forward and relieve the tension. So it would stop fighting. The colt spooked and rather than going forward, it went straight up. All four feet came off the ground and I swore it hung there for a full five seconds. Its back arched to the right and it threw its head back in utter defiance. It fell on its side, all six hundred pounds, and then I heard the sound. The "pop" after its head slammed into the dust. Not a bone popping, but the pop of implosion, and then the syrupy gush of flat red blood. The colt lay motionless, staring calmly at me; its mouth open and hooves bent. I felt sick.

"My God!" My father was great with words. "I'll get the vet, you boys get a tarp and hold over it. Keep it in the shade."

We stood there and stared in disbelief.

"MOVE!" We ran and retrieved the canvas tarp and held it tent-like over the corpse. The blood looked like a bucket of red paint pumped from the colt's ear. My little brother and I stared at the dead colt for twenty minutes until my father returned with the vet *and* Mr. Dunn.

The vet looked at the colt and felt around its ears. "Cerebral hemorrhage. Nothing to do but bury it."

"How'd it happen?" Mr. Dunn put his hands on his hips and winced in the sunlight.

"Uh, well, the colt spooked, I guess, and flew up into the air and busted its head. Happened before I could stop it. My boys seen it, right boys?"

I nodded with my brother before I realized I had just committed murder. Because I wouldn't tell the truth. "My father beat the horse," I thought. I tried to think it louder. "My father beat the horse into a crazed frenzy, Mr. Dunn," hoping someone would read my mind.

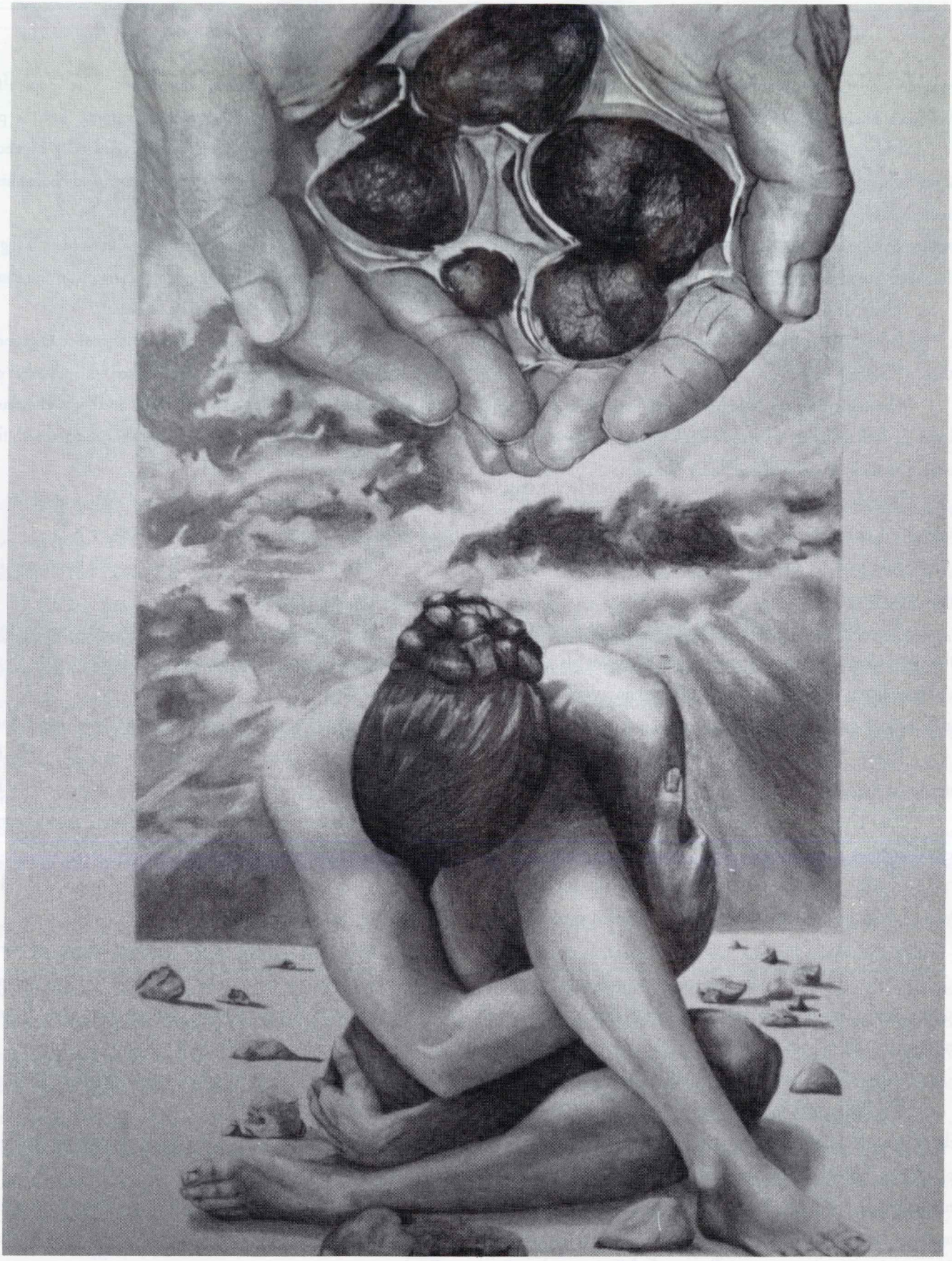
"Well, get rid of it." And that was that. Get rid of it, which meant "tell your boys to bury it."

Mr. Dunn and the vet left together, leaving the four of us behind because now the colt was part of me—an extension of myself, or at least a symbol of my childhood that was destroyed. I stared at myself when I looked into those dark reflective eyes.

"Bury it." Two shovels clanged into the dirt from my father's open hand.

The "you" in "you son of a bitch" pursed my lips, but my tongue spit out "yes sir."

I knew better now how Christ felt when he accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy, because there's no manhood to be found in a liar.



Aimee Thornton
Graphite

The Tower

Dedication

1992

In memory of

Alisa Macpherson

Michael Todd Anthony

Jennifer Monroe

Diane Michelle Beaver

Their essence remains in our memories of their dreams, beliefs and accomplishments. We are thankful for the opportunity to have shared in their lives.

—Biographies—

E. Brooks Brown is working on her B.F.A. and is incredibly poor; therefore, she eats white bread and bologna. She also plays a mean guitar.

April Leigh Camp is a Senior majoring in English and IIS. Wanted: decent job upon graduation.

Prentiss Douthit is a Senior, B.F.A. major.

Sharon Renee Evans is a Junior majoring in early childhood education.

Kelly S. Gamble is a Leo born in the Year of the Rat who performs with Anomally Local and is majoring in English.

Satya Gbadamosi is a third year student from Tuskegee, Alabama. Her favorite authors include Herman Hesse and Lorraine Hansbery.

Karma de Gruy is a second year English major.

Ben Heu is a Junior, B.F.A. major.

Michael Johnson is an extremely confused Senior.

Anthony Jay Jones is a Senior English major from Gadsden.

Gina Killingsworth is a Senior psychology major.

Michael McElroy is a Junior English major from Gadsden.

Scott Martin is a Senior English major from Pelham who owns and shows a five-gaited American Saddlebred.

Bryce R. Northen is a long time UM student who is happy to finally be moving out of town.

Phil Proctor is a Senior majoring in history and minoring in art. He is deeply moved by the "vanishing landscape" of country stores, framed churches and open dog trot houses.

Grant Tatum is a Senior, B.F.A. major.

Aimee Thornton holds a B.S. in mathematics and is working for her M.E.D. She enjoys art as a hobby.

Jess Marie Walker is a performance artist and Editor of *Dang* magazine.

P.C. Wilm is a Renaissance man from Theodore, Alabama. He enjoys collecting Duke Ellington music.

Angel Yarbrough is a Freshman marine biology major from Mobile.

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